

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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O 210345 Z APR 73

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0979

S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 3777

EXDIS

DEPT PASS SECDEF, AID, USIA, CINCPAC, EMB SAIGON,
BANGKOK, VIENTIANE, COMUSMACTHAI, USSAG/7 TH AF

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AEMR, PINS, CB

SUBJECT: PROPOSED MANDATORY EVACUATION OF DEPENDENTS AND
REDUCTION OF STAFF IN PHNOM PENH

1. THE FALL YESTERDAY OF SIEM REAP, A VILLAGE ON ROUTE
2 ONLY TEN MILES SOUTH OF PHNOM PENH, HAS FOCUSED
OUR ATTENTION ONCE AGAIN ON THE APPARENTLY SPREADING
UNWILLINGNESS OF FANK SOLDIERS TO STAND UP TO ENEMY
FIRE. FOR WHATEVER CAUSES, THIS PHENOMENON HAS BEEN
REPEATEDLY AND INCREASINGLY NOTED OVER THE PAST TWO
MONTHS ON HIGHWAYS 1, 2, AND 3, ALONG THE SOUTHERN
MEKONG, AND MOST RECENTLY IN KEP. WHILE FANK CONTINUES
TO MAINTAIN NUMERICAL SUPERIORITY IN THE PHNOM PENH
AREA AND HAS THE FIRE POWER FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE CAPITAL,
WE CAN NO LONGER MAKE A RELIABLE ESTIMATE OF
FANK WILLINGNESS TO DO SO, GIVEN ITS DETERIORATING
MORALE AND PERFORMANCE. THE POSSIBILITY OF THE
PERIODIC INTERDICTION OF POCHENTONG AIRPORT, THE
REMAINING RELATIVELY RELIABLE LIFELINE TO THE OUTSIDE
WORLD, HAS NOW ALSO INCREASED AS ENEMY PROBES DRAW
NEARER TO THE CAPITAL, ADDING TO THE UNPREDICTABILITY
OF THE SITUATION. IN ANY POTENTIAL EMERGENCY, THE
EMPLOYMENT OF US AIR POWER IN THE POPULATED URBAN
PERIMETERS OF PHNOM PENH PRESENTS MORE SERIOUS PROBLEMS
THAN ELSEWHERE BECAUSE OF THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT.

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FINALLY, THERE IS LITTLE PROSPECT OF SUBSTANTIAL IMPROVEMENT IN THE MILITARY AND SECURITY ENVIRONMENT OF PHNOM PENH OVER THE SHORT TERM NOR IN ITS SUPPLY- RELATED CRISES AFFECTING ELECTRICITY, WATER, AND CONSUMABLES.

2. AMONG FOREIGNERS, THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY IS UNIQUELY VULNERABLE. WE ARE CONTINUINGLY REFERRED TO AS AN ENEMY IN NVA/ VC/ KHMER INSURGENT PROPAGANDA, AND OUR FURTHER IDENTIFICATION WITH THE RECENTLY INTENSIFIED AIR WAR HAS DOUBTLESS MAGNIFIED THE HOSTILITY TOWARDS US OF THE FORCES OPPOSING THE GKR. MEMBERS OF THE OFFICIAL US COMMUNITY IN PARTICULAR RISK BEING EITHER VICTIMS OR HOSTAGES SHOULD THERE BE A RAPID TURNABOUT IN THE SITUATION. WE ARE ALMOST ENTIRELY DEPENDENT FOR PROTECTION ON THE LOCAL GENDARMERIE OF UNCERTAIN RELIABILITY IN TIME OF CRISIS.

3. EMERGENCY EVACUATION PLANNING IS WELL ADVANCED, WITH USSAG NOW RESPONSIBLE FOR PHASE TWO C-130 AIRLIFT AND PHASE THREE HELICOPTER LIFT. HOWEVER, THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH WE WOULD HAVE TO RESORT TO EMERGENCY EVACUATION, WITH CIVIL PANIC AND DISORDER POSSIBLY WIDESPREAD, SUGGESTS THAT A PRIOR EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO REDUCE PERSONNEL AT THE MISSION THROUGH PHASE ONE USE OF COMMERCIAL FACILITIES AND THE DEFENSE ATTACHE AIRCRAFT.

4. I THEREFORE PROPOSE AT ONCE (A) TO MAKE MANDATORY THE EVACUATION OF THOSE DEPENDENT WIVES REMAINING AT THE POST TO BANGKOK OR ANOTHER POINT OF THEIR CHOOSING DURING THE NEXT WEEK; (B) TO OFFER ALL SINGLE WOMEN EMPLOYEES AND WORKING WIVES THE OPTION RPT OPTION OF EVACUATION; AND (C) TO ASK ALL ELEMENTS OF THE MISSION, INCLUDING THE MILITARY, TO DRAW UP LISTS OF LESS ESSENTIAL PERSONNEL, WITH A VIEW TO THEIR PHASED DEPARTURE WITHIN AN EARLY TIME FRAME, EITHER ON EVACUATION ORDERS OR TRANSFER. IN THE CASE OF ECON AND MEDTC WE WILL PROPOSE STATIONING LESS ESSENTIAL PERSONNEL IN BANGKOK OR SAMAE SAN, THAILAND, WHERE THEY CAN STILL CONTRIBUTE TO ON- GOING PROGRAMS HERE. PARTICULARS ON ALL MOVEMENTS WILL BE COMMUNICATED SEPARATELY.

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5. THESE ACTIONS MAY HAVE CONSIDERABLE IMPACT ON GKR

MORALE, EVEN IF DISCREETLY ADMINISTERED, SINCE THEY CANNOT BE KEPT FROM THE OMNIPRESENT FOREIGN PRESS OR OUR LOCAL STAFF. WE WILL SIMPLY HAVE TO ACCEPT THAT RISK. BUT THERE COULD ALSO BE A SALUTARY IMPACT ON GKR LEADERS AND THE FANK COMMAND IN DEMONSTRATING TO THEM THAT ONLY THEY HAVE THE WHEREWITHAL, IN THE LAST ANALYSIS, TO DEFEND THE CAPITAL AND THEMSELVES. THE UNFAVORABLE IMPACT SHOULD ALSO BE MITIGATED BY THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF A SIZEABLE MISSION HERE OF PROBABLY MORE THAN 100 US PERSONNEL AND OVER 50 THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS. AT A SUITABLE POINT, AND IN A MANNER CALCULATED TO INSPIRE BETTER PERFORMANCE, WE WILL CANDIDLY INFORM GKR AND FANK LEADERS OF OUR ACTIONS AND THE REASONS FOR THEM.

6. I AM PROCEEDING WITH THESE MEASURES TO TRIM DOWN THE STAFF FOR WHAT WILL IN EFFECT BE LARGELY CRISIS MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS AND ESSENTIAL AID AND MEDTC OPERATIONS IN CLOSE CONSULTATION WITH THE COUNTRY TEAM, ALL OF WHOM CONCUR THAT THE ACTIONS NOTED IN PARA FOUR ARE NOW TIMELY. AS A CONCOMITANT TO THEM, AGENCIES SHOULD INSTRUCT ALL PERSONS ASSIGNED OR ENROUTE TO PHNOM PENH TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE MISSION BEFORE THEY PROCEED. YOU MAY ALSO WISH TO CONSIDER A WARNING NOTICE FOR ISSUE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC DISCOURAGING TRAVEL TO CAMBODIA. PLEASE LET ME HAVE ANY COMMENTS URGENTLY.
SWANK

NOTE BY OC/ T: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEES.

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